Chapter 20

Education: Instrument for Socio-Economic and Humanizing Development

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses the role of education in “humanizing the economy” and emphasizes its contribution to the development of a new socio-economic model that helps to overcome the irregularities present in contemporary society. It proposes the implementation of school practices aimed at the completeness of the individual and in favor of social balance. It also emphasizes the importance of the humanizing process in the attainment of values such as, justice, freedom, solidarity and cooperation, which are structuring values of social cohesion. The primary data focused on the Secondary Education in the Districts of Braga and Viana do Castelo, in the northwest of Portugal. Interviews were conducted with school principals as main actors in the research. In spite of the limitations of the work, the results show that, in Portugal, education is still focused on individualism. It is also noted that assimilation of social aspects and humanization is weak, which inhibits placing the individual at the center of economic concerns and produces negative externalities on economic and social performance including wellbeing.

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INTRODUCTION

This study is centered on education as an instrument that fortifies the path to humanizing the society. Promoting awareness in and commitment to social and economic action (Freire, 1997), teaching the person to be human (Morin, 2003) and programs that lead to humanizing the economy, are some of its impressive aspects. In this context, and in light of a new economic and social order, this study reflects on the role of education in the process of humanizing the economy and placing the human being at the center of debate. This research emphasizes the founding principles of the social economy, namely, values of democracy, respect, social justice, citizenship and collaboration. The literature on humanizing the economy is recent. It is related to the market crashes that the dominant economic system has been producing. Here, the market supposes that the forces of demand and supply are in tune, that economic rationality is an unquestionable principle and that the market regulates itself. However, the constant economic and social imbalances that plague society tend to deny those axioms. Therefore, humanizing the economy is a project aimed at renewing society, to imbue it with an awareness of social values that respect the individual as a whole and that appeal to new ways of being, feeling and acting in society. Humanizing the economy transforms the structure of society and guides the individual towards sustainable global development, to consolidate societal values in support of social inclusion and cohesion. It guides citizens towards the goals of a welfare economy and emphasizes social justice, citizenship and collaboration with social responsibilities. This is an underlying perspective in the quest for a society based on the completeness of the human being and his/her relationship with environmental forces.

The main aim of this study is to determine whether the ‘School’ as an Institution, is an instrument for humanizing the economy. One of the objectives of this study, is to ascertain whether secondary schools, specifically those located in the districts of Braga and Viana do Castelo, in the north-west of Portugal, are in alignment or not, with the aim of this study. The research rationale is to establish whether the specific cycle of studies pertaining to the curriculum of the 10th, 11th and 12th years of schooling, favors the student’s intra and interpersonal development and whether it renders concerns about happiness and social balance. This study is divided into two parts. The first contextualizes humanization and its potential paths. In the second, the primary data is presented, analyzed and discussed highlighting perspectives on the strength of humanizing the school. This study adopted a qualitative research method and the instrument used was the interview with the actors being school principals. Fieldwork took place between February and June 2016. The results obtained underline that the ‘School’ as an Institution, is not yet at the service of humanizing the economy because it continues to be driven by individualism, aggressive inter and intra-school competition and a lack of objectives in the social and human rights realm.

THE SCHOOL IN THE HUMANIZING PATH

Humanization is a broad process that consolidates the development of social values and respects the individual as a whole. Such a process postulates the awareness of justice, freedom and solidarity. The relationship between these values lies in the internalized trust bestowed on the economic stakeholder (Hannah, Avolio, Luthans, & Harms, 2008; Mooradian, Renzl, & Matzler, 2006; Ring & Van de Vem, 1992); albeit, trust is sometimes used as a proxy for social capital (Heliwel & Hung, 2010). Individuals react negatively to the lack of trust that sometimes translates into social injustice (Reychav & Sharkie, 2010).
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